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Macaulay Associates Network Ltd
CREATING POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

Churches and Community Report

Tony Macaulay

Scoping Research Study of Churches in Carrickfergus Borough
in 2009

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1 Introduction

This is a report on a Scoping Research Study carried out between February and March 2009 by independent researchers, Macaulay Associates, to provide a foundation for further action research by the Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum (CBCF) as part of its overall strategy to promote good relations, tolerance, trust, and respect for diversity within the church and the wider community.

The overall research question to be researched is:

“What is the nature of the relationship between the churches, and between the churches and the local community in the Borough of Carrickfergus and what is the impact of these relationships on community relations?”

The scoping study objectives were:

- a) To map existing relationships between the churches in Carrickfergus Borough.
- b) To map existing activities provided by the churches in Carrickfergus Borough.
- c) To map existing inter church and church-community relations in the area

2 Background

2.1 Carrickfergus Borough

Carrickfergus Borough is a local government district on the north shore of Belfast Lough in Co Antrim, Northern Ireland. It extends from Greenisland in the south-west to Whitehead in the east and covers 32 square miles. The main centre of population and administrative centre is the town of Carrickfergus.

On Census Day 29th April 2001 the resident population of Carrickfergus Local Government District (LGD) was 37,659¹. Of this population 8.7% were from a Catholic² community background and 85.1% were from a 'Protestant and Other Christian' community background. By 2021 the population is projected to be 43,495 persons.

¹ Source of population statistics: NISRA

² The use of the terms 'Catholic' and 'Roman Catholic' are contentious in Northern Ireland. In this report 'Roman Catholic' is used to refer to the church institution and the term 'Catholic' is used to refer to the parish, community or individuals of this tradition.

2.2 Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum

Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum³ was initiated by the Good Relations Department of Carrickfergus Borough Council and was officially launched in Carrickfergus Town Hall on Thursday 2nd October 2008 and it currently has 130 individual members. The Forum seeks to "promote good relations, tolerance, trust and respect for diversity, within the local church and wider community. It wishes to encourage a spirit of openness, acceptance and reconciliation, while seeking to actively respond on matters of spiritual and social concern in the community". The aims of the Forum are:

- To openly and actively promote respect for diversity of faith, culture and tradition.
- To foster involvement in local community building through reflective listening and active engagement, with special concern for those most in need.
- To bring people together encouraging co-operation, mutual understanding and an ability to live and work together.
- To promote healing and reconciliation in the community.

The objectives of the Forum are:

- To offer a safe and welcoming environment that is respectful, non-judgemental, and in which each person is valued.
- To promote understanding by organising conferences, lectures, workshops and visits that address sensitive issues within church and community.
- To provide opportunities for interactive encounters, including dialogue, discussion, debate and small group activity where all can share their experience of life as it relates to their sense of identity, faith, culture and tradition.
- To provide opportunities for co-operation between Churches, Christian organisations, their members and leaders, supporting existing activities and taking new initiatives.
- To work in collaboration with local agencies and community groups as we search for and implement practical ways in which Christian values and the Gospel of Jesus can serve to encourage and build up the community.

Membership is free and activities include networking, information sharing through the website, emailing and monthly newsletter, church community envisioning through training courses/workshops on education for reconciliation and theological reflection, and the running of cross community worship and prayer events. The Church Forum is a member of the Carrickfergus Community Forum and also the Christian Community Workers Alliance (CCWA)

³ www.carrickferguschurchforum.org

3 Research Methodology

The research study adopted an action research approach to maximise learning and development throughout the process. The agreed methodology for achieving the research objectives within the resources available was as follows:

3.1. Desk Research

Desk research was carried out to gather data from secondary sources on existing relevant activities and relationships in the area. A list of sources is in the Bibliography.

3.2. Scoping Workshop: Church and Community Consultation

A central part of the research was a Scoping Workshop. The 'Church and Community Consultation' took place on the morning of Saturday 14th March 2009 in Carrickfergus Town Hall.

The purpose of the workshop was to draw together a range of church leaders with sufficient shared knowledge to map out existing activities and relationships. The programme for the workshop is in Appendix I.

The CBCF wrote to the local churches inviting each church to send two representatives (ideally one clergy and one lay person) to participate in the workshop consultation. The letter of invitation is in Appendix II. The workshop was also advertised in the local press. Representatives of the community/voluntary sector were also invited to provide an overview of community sector and perspectives.

Twenty-one people from a range of churches and locations attended the consultation. A list of the participants is in Appendix III.

3.3. Telephone/Email Consultations

The scoping workshop was followed up with a series of emails requesting telephone interviews with additional key informants identified at the Scoping Workshop to follow up any possible gaps in knowledge/information on current activities and relationships. This produced some additional information from those who responded positively.⁴

3.4. Research Report

The draft research report was prepared and presented to an open public meeting on Thursday 26th March 2009 in Carrickfergus Town Hall.

The purpose of the meeting was to test the findings and feasibility of the recommendations. Following feedback from the meeting a final draft of the report was prepared and presented to CBCF.

⁴ Rev Lindsay Allen, Carrickfergus Baptist Church and Rev Mike Ewan, Whitehead Baptist Church

4 Main Findings

4.1 Churches in Carrickfergus Borough

The research identified 41 churches in Carrickfergus Borough in March 2009. There were:

- 28 churches in Carrickfergus
- 7 churches in Whitehead
- 6 churches in Greenisland

The full list of churches identified is in Appendix IV. This is the first time a complete list of churches in the Borough has been produced.

4.2 Church Relations

The mapping exercise revealed a complex network of relationships between churches across the Borough. This also extends to relationships with churches outside of the Borough (such as Larne and Newtownabbey).

There is a substantial level of informal contact and co-operation between churches throughout the Borough.

Most churches have contact and co-operation with several other churches.

A small minority of churches have little or no contact with other churches.

Several groupings of churches co-operate on inter church activities such as clergy fraternals, shared religious services and joint youth, mission and social initiatives. These inter church partnerships are more common than formal bilateral working or structural partnerships.

The level and nature of the relationships and the make up of the different inter church groupings is dependent on location/proximity, parish boundaries, theology, denomination, shared concerns, clergy priorities and past history.

In Carrickfergus there are several inter church groupings and some overlap between them, rather than one cohesive inter church group. Due to the smaller size of the local communities, there appears to be more cohesion and partnership among the churches in Greenisland and Whitehead than in Carrickfergus.

The Greenisland churches have a long history of contact, co-operation and partnership. This includes:

- Regular communication
- Churches supporting each other
- Co-operation to reduce competition and duplication of activities e.g. BB, GB and Mother & Toddlers
- A United Prayer Meeting
- A Friendship Lunch
- The Community Council
- Women's World Day of Prayer
- Youth Workers and Youth Work
- Summer Programmes
- Bowling Club
- Sports Club
- Christian Aid
- A joint Church Intergenerational Project

For the past ten years all of the churches in Whitehead have been working together on a series of joint activities and partnerships. They established the Genesis Youth Project ten years ago and are involved in the Street Reach Summer Project. For ten years the churches in the town ran joint Alpha Courses. This included rotating the venue for the courses between the Baptist, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches. There is a Minister's Fraternity for all clergy, a monthly Community Prayer Meeting and a joint Carol Service.

In Carrickfergus the largest inter church grouping is Mission Carrick. It includes around twelve evangelical Protestant churches in the town. It has been in existence for over 20 years initially to work together on evangelistic mission. Activities now also include clergy meeting together monthly for Bible study and prayer, joint services during Holy Week and congregational/pulpit exchanges. The level of activity of the group over the years has been dependent on the availability of clergy.

Several other inter church initiatives have grown out of Mission Carrick including 'The Source' Pregnancy Advice Centre and the NOISE Youth Project.

There is also a smaller informal cross community⁵ clergy fraternity that has met regularly over the last 10 years. It is closely linked with a cross community lay group drawn from a wide range of churches that has been active for 15 years. This group initiated 'Carrick Journey In Understanding', a project that explored diversity within the areas of religion, politics, culture and history. This group has, with the clergy, shared in united church services, and has supported the development of Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum.

⁵ Involving both Catholics and Protestants

4.3 Activities of Churches

In addition to church activities of religious worship, prayer, teaching mission and evangelism, many of the churches are involved in faith based youth, social and/or community activities.

Faith based and church based youth work is a major activity within the churches in the Borough. This involves large numbers of children and young people in the Borough in church based youth clubs and organisations such as the Boys and Girls Brigades. The churches are a major provider of youth services in the Borough.

Inter church youth initiatives include the REAL Youth Project in Greenisland, the NOISE Project and Hope Project in Carrickfergus and Genesis Youth Club in Whitehead.

Carrickfergus YMCA is an independent faith based voluntary youth organisation, which runs a range of programmes in the town including Glenfield PAKT. The YMCA is supported by volunteers from a range of churches in the town and has strong working partnerships with several churches.

Several churches are engaged deeply in community activities. For example:

- Carrickfergus Elim Church provides material support to the local community through 'Store House' in conjunction with social services referrals and is involved with Women's Aid and teaching English classes.
- St Nicholas Roman Catholic Parish is involved in a bereavement support group, cross community youth work, older peoples work (Autumn Club) and St Vincent de Paul
- Gateway Church is involved in a Gateway Club, Community Cells, and English Classes
- The Church of the Nazarene in Carrickfergus runs 'Good Morning Carrickfergus' to support isolated older people, and also hosts the Citizens Advice Bureau Clinic, Community Health Fairs and Suicide Prevention Training.

4.4 Church and Community Relations

The mapping exercise revealed that although there are some strong and growing links between church and community, there is a perceived gap between many churches and local communities, particularly the most social deprived communities in the Borough.

Four churches (less than 10% of churches in the Borough) are members of Carrickfergus Community Forum. Faith based groups currently make up 12% of the total membership of the Community Forum.

The 'Integrated Local Strategy for Carrickfergus Borough Council Area' published by Carrickfergus Local Strategy Partnership in 2002 commented that "*church based organisations are becoming more involved*" in community infrastructure.

Churches are generally regarded as having strong assets within the community such as buildings, funds, volunteers and skills. Churches are also perceived as being able to bring vision, enthusiasm, hope, safety and role models for young people.

On the other hand churches can also be perceived as being insular, middle class, poor at networking and disengaged from the community. Some community sector groups say they feel isolated and marginalised from the churches.

Another dimension of the gap between churches and the community sector is a limited experience and understanding of the role, resources and priorities of the churches in the community sector.

There is evidence that the gap between the churches and the community sector is being bridged through:

- Individual church members who work or volunteer in the community sector
- The churches that are most involved in community activities
- Faith based community orientated organisations such as the Church Forum and the YMCA

4.5 Impact on Community Relations

It is difficult to draw any conclusions on the impact of this level of cross community church contact and co-operation without further qualitative research with a wider sample of the local community.

However there is evidence that there are churches across the Borough that have a long history of cross community contact and co-operation.

There is regular and ongoing cross community contact and co-operation between most churches in Greenisland and Whitehead and between some of the churches in Carrickfergus.

The Protestant churches that have contact with the local Catholic parish in Carrickfergus tend to have strong links and there is evidence of cross community partnership on both spiritual and social issues.

However, many of the Protestant churches in Carrickfergus have little or no contact or co-operation with the local Roman Catholic Church. Respondents indicated that 'theological differences' prevent greater contact and co-operation. There is evidence that some Protestant churches may also have 'theological difficulties' with participating in any inter church activities or structures that include Catholic representatives.

5 Conclusions

The main conclusions of the scoping study are as follows:

- 1) The research identified 41 churches in Carrickfergus Borough in March 2009.
- 2) The mapping workshop revealed a complex network of relationships between churches across the Borough.
- 3) There is a substantial level of informal contact and co-operation between churches throughout the Borough.
- 4) Most churches have contact and co-operation with several other churches.
- 5) A small minority of churches have little or no contact with other churches.
- 6) Several groupings of churches co-operate on inter church activities such as clergy fraternals, shared religious services and joint youth, mission and social initiatives.
- 7) The level and nature of the relationships and the make up of the different inter church groupings is dependent on location/proximity, parish boundaries, theology, denomination, shared concerns, clergy priorities and past history.
- 8) There is cross community church contact and co-operation involving most of the churches in Greenisland and Whitehead and some of the churches in Carrickfergus.
- 9) Many of the Protestant churches in Carrickfergus have little or no contact or co-operation with the local Roman Catholic Church due to 'theological differences'. This can also prevent them from participating in inter church activities or structures that include Catholic representatives.
- 10) Many of the churches are involved in faith based youth, social and/or community activities.
- 11) The churches are a major provider of youth services in the Borough.
- 12) Several churches are deeply engaged in community activities.
- 13) While there are some strong and growing links between church and community, there is a perceived gap between many churches and local communities, particularly the most social deprived communities in the Borough.
- 14) Churches are generally regarded as having strong assets within the community such as buildings, funds, volunteers and skills. Churches are also perceived as being able to bring vision, enthusiasm, hope, safety and role models for young people.
- 15) Churches can also be perceived as being insular, middle class, poor at networking and disengaged from the community.
- 16) In the community sector there can be a gap in understanding of the role, resources and priorities of the churches.
- 17) Individual church members, churches involved in community activities and faith based community organisations are bridging the gap between the churches and the community sector.

6 Recommendations

As a result of the findings of the research to date the following recommendations are suggested:

- 1) The Church Forum should continue to support and encourage good inter church communication and relationships across the Borough, particularly through the role of lay people.
- 2) The churches in Carrickfergus that want to develop further inter church relations and activities should explore the idea of co-operating in localised cluster groups.
- 3) The churches that want to reduce the gaps between church and community should explore how to develop their role in the community.
- 4) The churches that want to reduce the gaps between church and community should consider joining Carrickfergus Community Forum.
- 5) The Church Forum should continue to develop good relationships and communication with Carrickfergus Community Forum.
- 6) The Church Forum and the Community Forum should work together to provide a safe space for conversations on the personal and community impact of current cross community church relationships in Carrickfergus.
- 7) The Church Forum, Community Forum and local churches should continue to develop ways of addressing sectarianism and racism within the church and community.
- 8) The Church Forum and Community Forum should develop a conversation between the churches and community groups to reduce the gaps between church and community and to build better relationships and increased co-operation.
- 9) The Church Forum should develop a strategy for the next three years that includes building its capacity to address the issues highlighted in this research.
- 10) The Church Forum should seek adequate resources to enable it develop and implement its strategy for the next three years.

Appendix I: Scoping Workshop Programme

CARRICKFERGUS BOROUGH CHURCH FORUM

Consultation on Church and Community

Saturday 14th March 2009

- 9.20am Arrival and Coffee
- 9.30am Introductions and Background to the Research
- 9.45am Purpose and Programme for the Consultation
- 10.00am Mapping Churches in the Borough
- 10.30am Mapping Relationships Between Churches
- Contact
 - Co-operation
 - Partnership
- 11.00am Mapping Relationship Between Churches and Community
- Contact
 - Co-operation
 - Partnership
- 11.30am Impact on Community Relations
- 12.00pm Identifying Needs and Gaps
- 12.30pm End

Appendix II: Scoping Workshop Invitation



Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum

Website: www.carrickferguschurchforum.org

Email: carrickferguschurchforum@hotmail.co.uk

Tel: 07759166421 or 07815081714

Consultation on Church and Community

Dear

Re: Invitation to Consultation on Church and Community on 14th March 2009

I am writing to offer a warm invitation to your church to be represented at a **Consultation Workshop on Church and Community in Carrickfergus Borough on Saturday 14th March 2009** in The Dobbs Room of Carrickfergus Town Hall from **9-30am - 12.30pm**, with coffee being served from 9-20am.

The workshop is an important part of a Scoping Study we have commissioned to map the relationships between the churches, and between the churches and the local community, in the Borough of Carrickfergus.

Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum has secured funding from the Council for an initial research study and we have appointed independent researchers, Macaulay Associates (www.macaulayassociates.co.uk) to carry it out between February and March 2009.

We hope that the research will highlight the current situation, identify gaps and inform the priorities for Carrickfergus Borough Church Forum as part of our overall strategy to promote good relations, tolerance, trust, and respect for diversity within the church and the wider community.

We are very keen to ensure that the research is inclusive of all of the churches and that it is advised and informed by the churches. So we would be grateful if you would appoint **two representatives** to attend the workshop (ideally a clergy person and a lay person).

You can confirm attendance directly with the researchers either by email tony@macaulayassociates.co.uk or by telephone 028 70831144 or by completing the enclosed return slip and posting it to: CBCF Consultation, c/o Macaulay Associates Network, 12 Mill Square, Portstewart, BT55 7TB, Northern Ireland.

The findings of this research will be presented at an open meeting, on Thursday 26th March at 7-30pm, again in the Dobbs Room. Again, we would be pleased to have your company at this meeting and would also extend a warm invitation to any representatives from your church, or members of your congregation who would like to attend.

We do hope you will be able to be involved in the workshop and we thank you in anticipation of any support you can give. In the meantime please do not hesitate to contact us if you would like further information.

Yours sincerely,



For CBCF Steering Committee

Appendix III: Scoping Workshop Attendees

- 1) Billy Ashe (Carrickfergus Community Forum)
- 1) Margaret Addis (Greenisland Community Council)
- 2) Steve Ames (Carrickfergus Gateway Church)
- 3) Olive Boyd (Greenisland Presbyterian Church)
- 4) Irene Carson (Greenisland Community Council)
- 5) Lorraine Craig (Carrickfergus Women's' Forum)
- 6) Roy Crowe (Carrickfergus Gateway Church)
- 7) Monica Donnelly (St Colman's RC Church, Greenisland)
- 8) Darren Jennings (Carrickfergus Elim Church)
- 9) Mary Johnston (Carrickfergus Methodist Church)
- 10) Ruth Johnston (Carrickfergus Gateway Church)
- 11) Bob Loade (Carrickfergus YMCA)
- 12) Owen Mulvenna (St Colman's RC Church, Greenisland)
- 13) Mike McCann (St Colman's Church of Ireland, Larne Rd, Carrickfergus)
- 14) Robert McKeown (St Nicholas' RC Church, Carrickfergus)
- 15) Marie McKeown (St Nicholas' RC Church, Carrickfergus)
- 16) Martin Murray (St Nicholas' RC Church, Carrickfergus)
- 17) Eileen Neilly (Greenisland Methodist Church)
- 18) Joy Rankin (St Nicholas' RC Church, Carrickfergus)
- 19) Joan Stephenson (Carrickfergus Church of the Nazarene)
- 20) Rev. Stephen Sheerin (Greenisland Methodist Church)
- 21) Arf Wright (Greenisland Church of Ireland)

Appendix IV: List of Churches in Carrickfergus Borough

CARRICKFERGUS

1. Carrickfergus Baptist Church
2. Carrickfergus Community Church
3. Carrickfergus Congregational Church
4. Carrickfergus Elim Pentecostal Church
5. Carrickfergus Free Presbyterian Church
6. Carrickfergus Gospel Hall
7. Carrickfergus Methodist Church
8. Carrickfergus Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship
9. Christchurch
10. Church of St Nicholas (Roman Catholic)
11. Cliffordgay Memorial Church Of The Nazarene
12. Commons Mission Hall
13. Downshire Presbyterian Church
14. Dunamis
15. First Carrickfergus Presbyterian Church
16. Gateway Church
17. Holy Trinity Church (Church of Ireland)
18. Joymount Presbyterian Church
19. Lighthouse Church
20. Loughmourne Presbyterian Church
21. New Beginnings
22. The Salvation Army
23. Sandringham Gospel Hall
24. St Colman's Church of Ireland
25. St Nicholas Church of Ireland
26. Victoria Evangelical Church
27. Woodburn Presbyterian Church
28. Woodlands Presbyterian Church

GREENISLAND

29. Church of the Holy Name (Church of Ireland)
30. Greenisland Church of the Nazarene
31. Greenisland Baptist Church
32. Greenisland Methodist Church
33. Greenisland Presbyterian Church
34. St. Colman's Church (Roman Catholic)

WHITEHEAD

35. Bethany Hall Christian Assembly
36. Our Lady of Lourdes (Roman Catholic)
37. St Patrick's Church of Ireland
38. Whitehead Baptist Church
39. Whitehead Congregational Church
40. Whitehead Presbyterian Church
41. Whitehead Methodist Church

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'What Are The Key Issues For Community Development In Carrickfergus ?', Lucy Simms, Carrickfergus Community Forum, April 2008

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